

Testimony to  
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From the point of view of the voluntary service field, the aging of California will provide all of us with a civic resource of unprecedented scale and potency.

This potential is not just a function of increasing population; it is also a product of the:

- Health, high skill and education levels of older Californians;
- distribution of the resource throughout all of our communities;
- span of years during which older Californians will have more time to serve; and
- the high level of interest of older Californians, including aging Baby Boomers, in voluntary service. (Surveys of older Californians conducted by our office are consistent with national studies in finding a high level of interest in volunteering that is second only to travel.)

Within the service field, we are moved by stories of intensive, decades-long service by many older Californians. We are simultaneously disappointed by the underutilization of this civic resource:

- A poll of older Californians conducted by our office in the year 2000, found that only 17% of respondents had volunteered in the past year though 53% of respondents planned to volunteer; and 34% wanted to increase their level of volunteering. (The Giving Years, Governor's Office on Service and Volunteerism, 2001)
  - National studies have found that volunteering drops off after retirement. The volunteering rate of older Californians, 17%, is substantially lower than the 25% overall rate of volunteering in California. (California's volunteering rate is 43<sup>rd</sup> in the nation.) (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2004)
  - National surveys have found that the average number of hours served by older Americans appears to be declining (Independent Sector).
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Older Californians embody a resource that is the match for many of the seemingly intractable problems of our time. What will it take to tap this resource? Following are ten recommendations:

1. A clear message describing the opportunity presented by the aging of California needs to be delivered loudly and repeatedly. The existence and dimensions of this resource remain generally unknown. This message has not been previously delivered and is at risk of being overwhelmed by messages citing the special needs and challenges faced by older Californians.

2. A supply of “formal” volunteer opportunities that meets the demand of interested older volunteers. (Formal volunteering is done through organizations and informal volunteering is person-to-person.) 73.8% of older Californians and 86.7% of the oldest cohort of Baby Boomers responding to our year 2000 survey stated that they “would start or do more volunteer work if [they] found an organization with values and a mission [they] truly support.” Not only are formal volunteering opportunities actively sought by older Californians, these opportunities are also best suited to meeting the critical needs of our state such as those related to education, public safety, environment, health services, emergency preparedness and response, etc. Formal volunteering is supported by organizations that perform functions critical to meaningful volunteering including recruitment, matching, screening, training, supervision, and recognition of volunteers. Volunteering does not “just happen.” The purposeful engagement and interaction provided by formal volunteering provides the benefits researchers have concluded have greater impact on health and longevity than diet and exercise.
3. A supply of “intensive” service opportunities that meets the demand of interested older volunteers and the needs of our state. Mentoring, tutoring, and helping the frail elderly to live independently are examples of activities that require volunteer service of longer duration, greater continuity, frequency, and intensity. Off all respondents to our year 2000 survey of older Californians that cited an interest in volunteering, 57.5% were willing to serve 2-4 hours per week, 19.8% 5-15 hours per week, and 4.3% more than 15 hours.

These intensive opportunities should include high skill, high impact volunteer roles that are of great interest to many older Californians. Many older volunteers do not see themselves “stuffing envelopes.” For example, at the Samaritan House Clinic in San Mateo volunteers provide high quality health care services to low-income residents and demonstrate on a daily basis the difference that can be made.

4. Systems for matching volunteers with volunteer opportunities: Numerous considerations are made by a prospective volunteer prior to making a service commitment (location, time of day, service activity, service recipient to name a few). A recent study (Volunteer Management Capacity in America’s Charities and Congregations, The Urban Institute, February 2004) estimated that America’s charities and congregations could take on an estimated 5.9 million new volunteers. Designs exist for a “clicks and bricks” matching system that combines available web-based technology with volunteer brokering institutions to better connect prospective volunteers with the organizations that need them. The costs for launching and maintaining a statewide system in California would be less than \$400,000 per year.

5. There are many established, proven, cost effective programs that provide meaningful service opportunities including the Foster Grandparents Program, Senior Companions Program, RSVP, and Experience Corps. Even the largest of these, RSVP, engages less than 0.75% of California's potential older volunteers. Substantial reductions in state funding for these programs and a low per capita share of federal funding for California severely limits these organizations. These programs should be greatly expanded with a combination of federal, state, private, and other local funds.
6. In addition to the need for a substantial increase in funding for existing programs, support is also needed for innovative demonstration programs. For example, one pilot program in California is testing and evaluating a design where physicians prescribe volunteering (Rx Volunteer). Demonstration programs are also needed to develop and test programs through which older volunteers take on the critical and persistent needs of our time, including but not limited to: tutoring our children, stewarding and restoring our natural environments; preparing for and responding to disasters and emergencies; mobilizing additional volunteers; providing access to decent health care; and helping our elders to live independently.
7. A greater understanding is needed of the unevenness of volunteering across the diverse groups that populate California. First and second generation immigrants are amongst those populations that could benefit from targeted strategies (The Ties That Bind: Changing Demographics and Civic Engagement in California, Public Policy Institute of California, 2004).
8. Incentives should be part of the effort to mobilize older Californians to fill intensive service roles. President Bush has proposed Silver Scholarships that would provide an education award (scholarship) that could be used by an older volunteer who has completed a term of service or transferred to a recipient of their choice. Changes to federal statute (National and Community Service Trust Act) could make the AmeriCorps education award (\$4,725 for 1,700 hours of service) more attractive to older Americans by allowing the award to be transferred. Others have proposed prescription drug discounts and other incentives.
9. Frequently cited barriers to volunteering include: the cost and availability of transportation to and from the service location, the cost of background checks for public sector volunteer organizations, multiple background checks for volunteers who change service locations, workers compensation coverage for volunteers serving in hospitals, and other liability concerns.
10. The transition out of the workforce or out of full-time employment is one of life's major changes. Employers and organizations that interact with those undergoing this transition (such as the Public Employees Retirement System, State Teachers Retirement System, and Social Security Administration) could play an

instrumental role by promoting volunteering and directing retirees to those resources that are available to help them find a volunteer opportunity. These changes are not only needed because the oldest cohort of Baby Boomers is reaching age 60 but also because the interest and potential represented by current generations of seniors is greatly underutilized.